D.J.R. BRUCKNER

Watching for Hoffa's prison door to open

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"MY DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN to President Fitzsimmons."

That was the President of the United States talking about the new president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Frank Fitzsimmons. And the Teamsters' door was open to Mr. Nixon just before he said that, when he visited the union's executive board.

Among members of that board are an officer who admitted guilt in taking payments from companies in violation of federal labor law and one under indictment accused of counterfeiting. Mr. Nixon's insensitivity to the public image he projects by chumming in that kind of company is not new. He had previously opened the White House door to a group of hard-hat union leaders, among whom were a couple who had fallen afoul of federal law.

THE DOOR TO WATCH NOW is that of the federal prison at Lewisburg, Pa., where James R. Hoffa is behind bars. The U.S. Board of Paroles rejected a plea by Hoffa in March for parole and told him to try again next year, but it has suddenly decided to consider the matter anew in August; it claims it has "new and substantial information." Earlier this year, Justice Department officials said no parole for Hoffa could be considered while he held union office. So, last month, after four years in prison, he finally resigned the presidency of the international union and the many posts he held in local IBT affiliates in Michigan.

At the Teamsters convention last week, the president of the United Auto Workers, which was rescued from fiscal disaster last year by IBT, said Hoffa is a "political prisoner."

Some political prisoner! The record of corruption swirling around Hoffa stretches back 20 years. He was one of the most powerful men in the United States, with virtually unquestioned control of America's largest union and domination of its immense pension and welfare funds. The pension fund alone is worth more than $800 million today. You would have to be very stupid not to realize what kind of power such a huge bag of risk money can give a man.

In his years in office Hoffa shielded and promoted local union officers who grew rich on the union, who formed sham locals for purposes of extortion and who consorted with leaders of organized crime.

A federal jury in Chattanooga, Tenn., convicted Hoffa of trying to tamper with a previous jury which was trying him, and he was sentenced to eight years in prison. Later he was given five more years after another federal jury convicted him and others of defrauding the pension fund of $25 million.

NOW, ABOUT POLITICS: The Chattanooga convicted rested largely on testimony by Edward G. Partin, a Louisiana local Teamster official who became an informant after he himself was indicted for embezzlement in 1962. Partin said in 1967 that he was offered $1 million to recant his testimony. That year, a close friend of Sen. Russell Long (D-La.) and a Louisiana state judge tried together to get Partin to sign an affidavit claiming the government used wiretaps to prepa[illegible] its jury tampering case.

When the Justice Department investigated these approach[illegible] to Partin, Long twice warned an assistant U.S. attorney gene[illegible] at that he risked indictment by Louisiana courts if he pe[illegible] sisted in the probe. Last week Partin was tried, in Montan[illegible] on charges of conspiring to violate antitrust laws. A mistri[illegible] resulted when the jury deadlocked, but the government h[illegible] tried its best to convict him.

This year the doors at Justice were opened for Hoffa's s[illegible] and a supporter of Hoffa to appeal to Atty. Gen. John Mitch[illegible] and to the chief of Justice's criminal division to get Hoffa o[illegible] of jail. The late Audie Murphy solicited the help of form[illegible] Sen. George Murphy in getting copies of a 31-page, unsign[illegible] document, said to be a Partin recantation, delivered to M[illegible] chell and to Mr. Nixon. After the episode of that affidavit [illegible] Louisiana, [illegible] could suspect a 31-page anything in the hands [illegible] Hoffa's fri[illegible]

THE TEAMSTERS CONVENTION, incidentally, placed [illegible] Fitzsimmons' hands the sole control over political contri[illegible] tions by the union. As America grows more restive, the p[illegible] erful leaders of labor have grown more conservative anyw[illegible] and it is not unthinkable that the Teamsters, or other uni[illegible] would support, if not Mr. Nixon, at least some congressi[illegible] and gubernatorial candidates of his party or of his preferen[illegible]

Fitzsimmons is a pleasant, gentle man, and nobody is [illegible] ing anything against him. But he is not the whole union. [illegible] people of the United States ought to keep a sharp eye on [illegible] door of Lewisburg, where that "political prisoner" is shut

Flora Lewis

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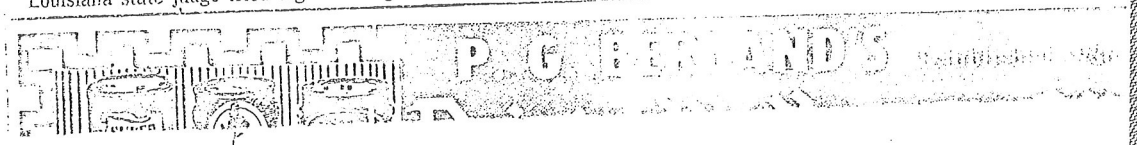
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